

4/20/25 Christ Fellowship

God's Love – John 3

Let me set the scene for you. It's somewhere mid-1970's in Joshua, Texas. It is maybe 2:00 in the afternoon and the Joshua ISD 3rd grade class is having recess. The teacher says we can play kickball and throws out one of those red rubber balls that we all remember so well. Can't you see it? I bet you can even smell that rubber and even hear the "poof" sound as somebody kicks it.

But before you can play, what's the first thing you have to do? You have to pick sides, right? Anybody else's anxiety start flaring up at just the mention of that? If your anxiety is not on the rise then you were probably a good athlete and got picked first or at least pretty quick. For me, most of the time I wasn't picked last but I certainly was not picked first. I was often overlooked and picked just before the girl with the doll in her hand and the kid with the broken leg.

I remember going home and my Mom would ask me what was wrong and I would tell her that I wasn't good enough to get picked early for the kickball game. You know, major third grade crisis. And my precious Mama would hug me and tell me that I was a good athlete and that they just couldn't see it and how impressed she was with me and that I was sweet and handsome and all the things a good, loving mother would say and she would make me feel all better.

Now, when we come to our loving Heavenly Father and tell Him that we aren't good enough to get into Heaven and that we aren't good enough to earn His grace and love, our good, good Father wraps us up in His arms and says, *"My dear one, you are exactly right. You are not good enough. Actually, there is nothing good about you."* In fact, in **Isaiah 64**, He literally says that the very best that you can do is like filthy rags. Well, that doesn't make me feel any better at all. Does it you? I thought He was a loving Father. I mean, that's bad news. That's going to be a problem, isn't it?

So, what are we going to do? Well, let's take a look at **John chapter 3** and we will see just what to do. But first, let's review what we have been studying the past few weeks. We have been looking at the attributes of God and we have seen the creativity of God in **Genesis chapter 1** as He created the very world we live in with just the word of His mouth. We saw the power of All-Mighty God in **Genesis 6** as He literally rained justice over the entire earth

with a flood. We saw God's amazing sovereignty as He allowed or even caused **Job** to go through more than any human should ever have to go through. And God never once asked Job's permission or even explained Himself to Job. We saw God's majesty when **Isaiah** had a vision of God in **chapter 6** and saw the seraphim and the smoke and the train of God's robe and Isaiah said, "*Well, phooey. I'm a dead man!*" **Isaiah** also is told by Holy God in **chapter 55** that God's ways are not our ways and His forgiveness is beyond our comprehension. And then last week, we had to see that God is also a just God in **Revelation 20** and will on the last day judge all unbelievers for what they have done. Yea, I don't really recommend preaching on Hell on Palm Sunday but it had to be done.

So, we have seen all these attributes of God and some of them – most of them – are fun and wonderful to talk about. I love to think about a loving, creative, powerful and forgiving God but we have to remember who we are praying to. We are praying to a God that is also a just God and will be the final Judge.

But this morning – this beautiful Easter morning – we are going to look at God's love and we are going to see the best passage of scripture to show off that love and it includes probably the most famous verse in all of scripture. Almost everybody knows **John 3:16**, right? Almost. I talked to a young man in jail just the other day and was showing him in scripture how to be saved. I read **Romans 3:23** that says we are all sinners. Then **Romans 6:23** says what we deserve for that sin is eternal death in Hell. And that's bad news. And then I said, "*But the Good News is found in verses like John 3:16. Do you know it?*" He said he had never heard it. I said, "*Well, man, have I got good news for you!*"

Let's read it. I want to read **John 3:16-18**. If you remember, Jesus is speaking to one of the Pharisees, a man named Nicodemus, who came to see Jesus one evening. If you read from verse 1 you will see that Nic walks in and basically says a couple of pleasantries and the first words out of the mouth of Jesus are, "*To get to Heaven, you must be born again.*" That's my version. He's not beating around the bush. But Jesus does go on to explain and has in this conversation the best description of God's love.

John 3:16-18 says, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever*

believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Now, before we go any further, if you mark in your Bibles like I do, I recommend you underline the phrase "*the world*" in **verse 16** and then add up above it or in the margin your name. "*For God so loved Todd...*" Personalize it because that is how it is meant to be.

But there are some problems with this famous verse. One of them is that it becomes too familiar and it loses some of its power in our minds. I remember years ago at Vacation Bible School I just happened to be walking past a room filled with kids that were learning this verse from their teacher and the teacher asked me to come in and lead the kids in this verse. "*Well sure I will. Are y'all ready? ...Uh, how does it go again?*" I completely forgot it.

Another problem with it is that we just quote it and forget its history and context. Nothing wrong with quoting it of course. It stands well all by itself. But to really see the power of God's love, we need to remember that this all started in the Old Testament. In fact, it started all the way back in **Genesis 3** in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned. Do you remember what happened? In **verse 21** it says that God made clothes for them out of skin. That skin had been a living animal but as we will see, every time there is sin, God the Father says that something had to die.

Then in **Leviticus 4** and **Numbers 15**, the Mosaic Law codified the sacrifices that had to be made when there was sin. They had to take an animal and sacrifice that animal and then the priest would sprinkle some of the blood over the altar and it says that God was appeased with that. He said that was what it took to be back right with Him. The sacrifice would make atonement for their sins and satisfy the wrath of God.

God took this so seriously that there are a few times in scripture that somebody didn't do the sacrifice just right and do you know what happened to them? They died. Dead right there. If the high priest went into the Holy of Holies and didn't do everything just right... dead right there. God hated sin so much that He said wherever there is sin, something had to die to pay the price. Death was the price that had to be paid.

But that was the Old Testament and we all know that God loosened up quite a bit in the New Testament, right? He chilled out with all that sin equals death stuff, didn't He? Nope. In the Old Testament, God said in **Malachi 3**, "*For I the Lord do not change.*" Then in the New Testament, it says in **Hebrews 13**, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and*

forever.” In other words, God hated sin in the Old Testament, the New Testament and just as much today. So, even today, where there is sin something has to die. Well, we don’t sacrifice any critters up in here so what happens? Actually, I did see a mouse in here the other day and I tried to sacrifice him but I couldn’t catch him.

No, we don’t do sacrifices because it was God the Father’s plan all along to send His Son Jesus to Earth to be the perfect sacrifice. Now, let me explain this by explaining the difference between **expiation** and **propitiation**. I learned this in Ben’s Wednesday night Bible study years ago when we went through the book of Romans for like two decades. Expiation and propitiation are probably not words you use very often. In fact, many of you have never heard them before except for some of you hoodlums that have been to jail and have had to pay a fine. It’s possible the word “expiation” was used in there somewhere because that is what it means.

Here's the scenario. You go to jail and stand before a judge and the judge says you owe \$1000. You pay the thousand. That is expiation. The fine is paid. You don’t owe anything else. You have literally paid your debt to society. Go home.

But let’s say you have done something really bad. You are guilty. You know it. The law knows it. And the law says you must pay a heavy fine. Oh, but it’s okay because the judge is your dad. You know he’s going to go easy on you, right? No problem. But the judge, in all his authority and being a just judge and following the law, says you owe \$100 million dollars. That’s bad news. You don’t have a hundred million dollars. But that is the price you have to pay. It’s the law. The judge is just doing what is right and fair and there is no appeal. What are you going to do?

But then, just as the gavel is pounded onto the desk decreeing the verdict, the judge gets up, takes off his robe and goes and pays the fine in full. That, my dear family, is propitiation. And that is what God has done for us because of His great love for us. And it is when we see His love for us like this that we can really start to see all those other attributes of God kicking in as well.

Can you see the **creativity** of God to be able to come up with a plan before the world began to provide a way for Him to be just and loving at the same time and yet give us a way out of His wrath? Can you see His **power** that made a way to send His Son to Earth in bodily form? Can you see His **sovereignty** in that He never once asked your opinion or

anybody else's opinion on how to do it? He just did it. Can you see His **majesty** that would cause sin to be such an affront to Him? Can you see His **holiness** that makes the ridiculous idea of forgiveness possible for people like me and you? His **justice** is obvious in this because He made the law and He paid the price the law said was due. And He did all of that because He **loves** you!

The early church leader Augustine was once approached by a heathen who showed him his idol and said, *"Here is my god; where is yours?"* Augustine replied, *"I cannot show you my God; not because there is no God to show but because **you have no eyes to see Him.**"*

If you can see a tree, you can see God. Not because God is the tree or the tree is God but because the tree has been created. And if something has been created, there has to be a Creator. And if you can't see God the Creator it is because you don't have eyes to see Him. You don't want to see Him because you know that if there is a Creator then He deserves your worship and that would mean you have to take yourself off the throne and put Him on.

If you can read John 3:16 and not see God in all His power and majesty and creativity and justice and love then you have no eyes to see. If you read this passage and see a benevolent heavenly grandfather tottering around Heaven waiting for you to ask him for a present, you have no eyes to see the one, true God. The God of John 3:16 is the all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful Hero of Heaven, the Warrior of Israel and the King that all other kings will one day bow down to. And that God loves you so much He sent His Son to die on the cross to be the perfect sacrifice and pay the debt you couldn't pay.

My favorite story of the love of Jesus is the perfect Easter story as well. It comes from **John chapter 20** where it says, "Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ He asked her, *"Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"* Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, *"Mary."*

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

Music

Poor Mary had been with Jesus through thick and thin and she saw how much He loved her and so she loved Him. She was crying because she thought her Savior and Friend was dead but as soon as she heard Him say her name, she knew His voice and responded.

Let me just tell you again. *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”* And He loves you and died for you. He rose again after three days and is calling your name today and wants to be your Savior and your Friend. Will you respond? What better day than on the day we celebrate His resurrection, the resurrection that proves His love for you?

If you never have before, do just what John 3:16 says to do and just believe in Him and allow that belief to change your entire life. If it doesn’t change your entire life, it’s just head knowledge, not true belief. Ask God to forgive you of all your sins and then repent of those sins and turn away from that lifestyle. Do it right now as the music plays.